

# HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



## USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars)	\$103.6
Public Health	30.6
Economic Reactivation	53.5
Disaster Mitigation	6.6
Education	4.5
Municipal Infrastructure	2.9
Transparency and Accountability	1.0
Food Aid	4.5



Departments of Nicaragua  
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

## RESTORING AND IMPROVING PRODUCTION WITH ALTERNATIVE CROPS

**Las Sabanas, Nicaragua**—Farmer Juan Antonio Gonzalez had planted strawberries in the past but never had much luck with them. Using a technique he learned from a USAID-funded World Relief Project, Gonzalez now has a thriving strawberry patch.

World Relief received \$6.3 million from USAID for an agriculture reactivation program in areas affected by Hurricane Mitch. One of those areas is Las Sabanas, located in Nicaragua's cool climate mountain zone in the northern department of Madriz. Farmers here traditionally grow coffee and basic grains. However, many of them lost their crops after Hurricane Mitch.

"I lost 500 coffee plants," said Gonzalez. The following year,



Juan Antonio Gonzales increases his family income by growing strawberries, a nontraditional crop for Nicaraguan farmers.

with low production levels, he was still unable to recover his losses. Since then, coffee prices have plummeted.

The program goal is to help farmers like Gonzalez to recover and to increase production by offering them an alternative to traditional crops. The cool climate of Las Sabanas provides an opportunity for farmers to grow apples, peaches, strawberries, blackberries and raspberries.

However, as these crops are not traditionally grown in Nicaragua, the USAID/World Relief program has set up an agricultural resource center to experiment with plant



The USAID/World Relief project set up nurseries to offer farmers a wide variety of new plants including strawberries, peaches, apples, raspberries and pecans.

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varieties and to train farmers in growing the new plants.

The resource center in Las Sabanas, one of three constructed by the project, covers an area of 48 acres, including 31 acres of forest. One of the program's objectives is to convey to farm-

ers a sense of the importance of forests for erosion control, so the forest at the site will remain untouched. Farmers also learn terracing techniques and how to construct barriers to prevent soil erosion

A two story training center was constructed at the site to host workshops for producers and technicians. The training and technical assistance provided covers agricultural methods, marketing skills and business and credit management. The resource center also has a fully operational meteorological station, developed in collaboration with the Nicaraguan National Institute of Territorial Studies (INETER), that provides a wide range of information needed for building a profile of the climatic conditions of the region.

The remaining land at the resource center has been planted with peach and apple trees, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. Different varieties of the fruits have been planted to determine the most suitable varieties for Nicaragua. Plant nurseries containing avocados, peaches, blueberries and pecans have



*The meteorology station in Las Sabanas monitors climatic conditions and will provide farmers with important information for growing crops.*

also been established and will be available to farmers in the area to encourage them to plant these non-traditional crops.

Having learned new methods for growing the cool climate crops, Juan Antonio Gonzalez is doing some testing

of his own with new varieties of fruits. On a small 12 meter by 25 meter plot, Gonzalez has planted strawberries, blackberries, avocados, several citrus trees and a new variety of tomato plant. While he still plans to plant traditional corn and bean crops, strawberry sales have gone so well for Gonzales that he is in the market to buy another small plot of land to expand his production. With a family of 10 to support, the extra income from the strawberry sales is clearly helping Gonzales to recover from Hurricane Mitch and to improve his family's standard of living.



*The USAID/World Relief project instructs farmers in the best techniques for growing strawberries.*

## ***Economic Reactivation***

*USAID's \$53.5 million agricultural program encourages farming methods that will help restore the economic livelihood for approximately 100,000 farmers while protecting the environment. The economic reactivation program includes rehabilitating and improving farms through crop diversification, community irrigation systems and better farming methods that will increase yields and protect the environment. This includes repairing 1,400 km of rural roads, clearing over 1,200 km of watercourse and training 35,000 small farmers to use environmentally sustainable practices.*



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